

# Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

## *Position Paper on Trauma-Sensitive Services*

### **Definition and Effects of Trauma:**

Psychological trauma involves events or experiences that confront the person directly or as a witness with the actuality or the immediate threat of death, extreme human suffering, severe bodily harm or injury, coercive exploitation or harassment, sexual violation, violence motivated by ethnocultural prejudice, or politically based violence.

Psychological trauma has a direct impact on the brain, associated bodily and neurological, and stress response systems. This causes imbalances in mood, memory, judgment, and involvement in relationships and work. The psychobiological impact of trauma leads to a sense of fear, helplessness, horror, detachment, and/or confusion.

Experiences of interpersonal trauma (such as childhood physical or sexual abuse or neglect, or adult domestic violence) are a betrayal of basic human values and often cause lasting and severe post-traumatic impairment in the survivor's basic sense of self, trust in others, involvement in society and culture, and the health and integrity of his/her body.

Persons with severe and persistent behavioral health problems, including mental illness and/or substance use disorders, often have experienced trauma. Many suffer from post-traumatic symptoms which exacerbate their other behavioral health problems, impair their psychosocial functioning, and interfere with the quality of their and their loved ones' lives.

### **Meaning of Recovery:**

Recovery is the core goal for trauma survivors, their families, and their treatment providers. Recovery does not necessarily mean complete freedom from post-traumatic impairment, as many survivors live healthy and rewarding lives while still having to manage post-traumatic symptoms. Recovery means regaining the understanding, support, and practical and psychotherapeutic assistance that enables trauma survivors to find within themselves a genuine basis for hope and personal, relational, and spiritual renewal.

### **Value Statement:**

The following are guidelines for the current and future development of trauma sensitive services within the DMHAS service system. The guiding principle is that persons who have survived psychological trauma, in particular interpersonal trauma, can and do recover when provided services that are sensitive to their special needs.

- Service providers must be cognizant of the origins of trauma, the effects of trauma on survivors and their loved ones, and the possibility that re-traumatization may occur if safe, effective, sensitive services are not available.
- Survivors of trauma cope courageously and resourcefully with the enormous burden that post-traumatic symptoms place on the body, mind, and emotions. Their fears, anxieties, anger, and grief, are real.

- Post-traumatic reactions must be understood as the persistence of real biological and psychological imbalances that require specialized care from behavioral health care and substance abuse providers.
- Behavioral health assessment, care planning, and treatment and rehabilitation services must be informed by a sound scientific, clinical, culturally relevant, and humanistic understanding of the impact and impairment caused by psychological trauma.

**Value Base:**

The widespread prevalence of trauma survivors in treatment for behavioral health issues brings trauma to the forefront of our priorities as a human service agency. The minimum definition of trauma sensitive services are those that:

- are provided in environments that protect privacy and confidentiality, ensure a consistent and predictable helping relationship, and create a place of freedom from revictimization,
- are provided by agencies and staff that are specially trained in specific behaviors, attitudes, and policies that recognize, respect and value the uniqueness of individuals and diverse cultural groups,
- minimize restraint/seclusion/isolation or other methods that re-traumatize survivors,
- enable survivors to exercise personal choice in seeking and engaging in services,
- elicit active participation and employ the regular input of trauma survivors to improve services, and
- address a range of social and relational issues such as health care, housing, parenting, educational and vocational deficits, and family stability.

**Governing Principles:**

Assisting in the recovery from the effects of abuse and other forms of trauma is essential to the well-being of survivors. Because recovery is integral to the mission of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, this department will commit to the provision of services that are responsive to clients in the DMHAS behavioral healthcare system who are trauma survivors.

- DMHAS will provide training and technical assistance to providers who will develop integrated trauma-sensitive services for their client population.
- DMHAS will seek to reduce and eliminate those practices identified as having a negative or re-traumatizing effect on trauma survivors.
- DMHAS will ensure that service providers are aware and respectful of the importance of the values, traditions, and customs of the clients they serve.
- DMHAS will combat barriers to the development and provision of trauma-sensitive services for all persons engaged in DMHAS, or DMHAS-funded services.

***For more information on the CT Trauma Initiative please contact Judy Ford, Director of Women's Services, [Judith.Ford@po.state.ct.us](mailto:Judith.Ford@po.state.ct.us) or 860-418-6732.***